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ABSTRACT

This annotated list of reading material available to American children in 1776 includes both items published on this side of the Atlantic and works issued abroad and sold here as imports. The titles are divided into five categories: (1) primers and other instructional texts, (2) works intended for moral and religious instruction, (3) stories, (4) rhymes and songs, and (5) game and fun books. Historical notes are included with each annotation. (HTH)

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CHILDREN'S READING IN AMERICA 1776

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A Selection of Titles

Compiled by
Virginia Haviland

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Preface

This little list of primers, stories, rhymes, and other reading matter available to American children in 1776 includes both items published on this side of the Atlantic and works issued abroad and sold here as imports. These are known to us today from copies in rare book collections or from early advertisements by booksellers. The occasional American post-1776 imprint is cited when its British forerunner was obviously available by 1776 through booksellers deriving stock from abroad. Some American editions were issued with changes to make them seem more American.

After the nonimportation agreement went into effect in 1769, most Boston booksellers conscientiously declined to sell imports, although dealers in other cities did not cease to order copies from London and other British publishers. During the revolutionary wartime and preceding years when ink and paper were hard to procure, American publishing for children was lean indeed for such nonessentials as leisure reading. It is clear, however, through examination of early books and study of documentation by historian-bibliographers for those years that children fortunate enough to have books to read could be given stories as well as primers and the Bible; they could enjoy fairy tales and nursery rhymes, if their adults chose to allow them to lighten their days of learning in this manner.

Locations of these early works in rare book collections can be found in d'Alté Welch's *Bibliography of American Children's Books Printed Prior to 1821* or the *National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 Imprints.*

Virginia Haviland
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Reference Department

Primers & Other Instructional Texts

A BATTLEDORE, to instruct and amuse. York [Eng.] Printed and sold by C. Croshaw,

Pavement, York. [17—] [Boston, Horn Book, Inc., 1941] folder ([4] p.) illus.

"A facsimile of an original Battledore owned by the Boston Public Library."

Battledores, folded cards with alphabets and syllables, began to come into use in the mid-eighteenth century. Facsimiles of two designs of battledores are available from the Horn Book, Inc.

THE CHILD'S NEW PLAY-THING: being a spelling-book, intended to make the learning to read, a diversion instead of a task. Consisting of a new-invented alphabet for children. A variety of lessons in spelling, of one, two, three, four, five, six, and seven syllables, with Scripture-histories, fables, stories, moral and religious precepts, riddles, &c. With entertaining pictures to each story and fable. The whole adapted to the capacities of children, and designed for the use of schools, or for children before they go to school. To which is added,—Three dialogues, shewing, first, How a little boy shall make every body love him. Second, How he shall grow wiser than the rest of his schoolfellows. And, third, How he shall become a great man. Philadelphia: Printed by W. Dunlap, at the Newest-Printing Office, on the South Side of the Jersey Market. M,DCC,LXIII. [1763] 136 p. illus.

D'Alté Welch describes the Boston edition of 1750 as "the first American child's book with folk tales." It includes such stories as "St. George and the Dragon," "Guy of Warwick," and "Reynard the Fox."

Giles Gingerbread. THE RENOWNED HISTORY OF GILES GINGERBREAD. A little boy who lived upon learning. <Price two coppers.> Boston: Printed by Mein and Fleeming, and to be sold by John Mein at the London Book-Store, North-side of King-Street. MDCCLXVIII. [1768] At which place may be had, a great variety of entertaining and instructive books for children. 34 p. illus.

A chapbook, one in John Newbery's *Lilliputian Library*, tells how Giles learned his alphabet from gingerbread letters.

[HORNBOOK. n.p., 1760?] 1 leaf, mounted on wood and covered with isinglass.

Contains the alphabet, syllables, and the Lord's Prayer.

"The hornbook was for centuries a child's first introduction to reading. The Nuremberg Chronicle, published in 1493, shows St. Cecilia holding a hornbook."

A replica is available today from the Horn Book, Inc.

THE NEW-ENGLAND PRIMER IMPROVED; for the more easy attaining the true reading of English. To which is added, The assembly of divines and Mr. Cotton's Catechism. Providence: Printed and sold by John Waterman, at the Paper-Mills. 1775. [80] p. illus.

This "Little Bible of New England" was issued in many editions from 1683 through 1830, in more than 400 variations.

In 1900 Ginn & Company in Boston issued a "twentieth century reprint" of *The New-England Primer Enlarged* (Boston: Printed by E. Draper, for B. Larkin, in Cornhill [1785?]) from a copy in the possession of Mr. G. A. Plimpton of New York. This edition contains a reproduction of a portrait of Washington attributed to Paul Revere.

Telescope, Tom, *pseud.* THE NEWTONIAN SYSTEM OF PHILOSOPHY; explained by familiar objects, in an entertaining manner, for the use of young ladies and gentlemen; by Tom Telescope, A.M. Illustrated with copper-plates and cuts. A new improved edition, with many alterations and additions, to explain the late new philosophical discoveries, &c. &c., by a Teacher of Philadelphia. Philadelphia: Published by Jacob Johnson, No. 147, High-Street. 1803. 137 p. illus.

First published in London by J. Newbery in 1761, "being the substance of lectures read to the Lilliputian Society, by Tom Telescope, A.M. And collected and methodized for the benefit of the youth of these kingdoms, by their old friend Mr. Newbery, in St. Paul's Church Yard."

TOM THUMB'S PLAY-BOOK: to teach children their letters as soon as they can speak. Being a new and pleasant method to allure little ones in the first principles of learning. Boston: Printed and sold by Kneeland and Adams, in Milk-Street. 1771. 31 p.

An edition published in Boston in 1764 is described as containing alphabet rhymes ("A a Apple pye" and "A was an Archer"), a scripture catechism, and prayers.

This title was reissued in Johnsburg, New York, by Buck Hill Associates in 1970.

Zeisberger, David. ESSAY OF A DELAWARE-INDIAN AND ENGLISH SPELLING-BOOK, for the use of the schools of the Christian Indians on Muskingum River. By David Zeisberger, missionary among the western Indians. Philadelphia: Printed by Henry Miller. 1776. 113 p.

Works Intended for Moral and Religious Instruction

Bible. *English. Paraphrases. 1765. Taylor.* VERBUM SEMPITERNUM. The third edition, with amendments. Boston: Printed for and sold by N. Procter, near Scarlet's-Wharffe. [1765] [282] p.

"The epistle" is signed J. Taylor.

An epitome of the Bible in verse, commonly known as the Thumb Bible because of its diminutive size.

Harris, Benjamin. THE HOLY BIBLE IN VERSE. [Boston, John Allen] 1717. [60] p. illus.

The cuts used for illustration here have been identified as identical to those in a later *New England Primer*.

THE HISTORY OF THE HOLY JESUS containing a brief and plain account of his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension into Heaven; and his coming again at the great and last day of judgment. Being a pleasant and profitable companion for children; composed on purpose for their use. By a lover of their precious souls. The twenty-fifth edition. Boston: Printed and sold by John Boyle in Marlborough-Street. 1774. [44] p. illus.

In verse. "The child's body of divinity" (an alphabet): p. [3]-[41] "St. Paul's shipwreck, Acts 26.27": p. [42]-[44]

The young apprentice Isaiah Thomas is believed to have done the crude little woodcuts which appeared in earlier Boston printings of 1747 and 1748.

THE HISTORY OF LITTLE KING PIPPIN: with an account of the melancholy death of four

naughty boys, who were devoured by wild beasts. And the wonderful delivery of Master Harry Harmless, by a little white horse. Philadelphia: Printed and sold by Young, Stewart, and M'Culloch, the corner of Chesnut and Second-Streets. 1786. 62 p. illus.

An English, Scottish, and Irish edition was advertised in 1775 by Francis Newbery in London. The first Worcester edition is dated 1778 and the second, 1795.

Janeway, James. A TOKEN FOR CHILDREN, being an exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary lives and joyful deaths of several young children. By James Janeway, Minister of the Gospel. To which is added, A token for the children of New-England, or, Some examples of children, in whom the fear of God was remarkably budding before they died; in several parts of New-England. [By Cotton Mather] Preserved and published for the encouragement of piety in other children. With new additions. Boston: Printed and sold by Z. Fowle, in Back-Street, near the Mill-Bridge. 1771. 156 p.

A work first published in England (1671–72), this became the most widely read children's book of the Puritan age.

A PRETTY PLAY-THING FOR CHILDREN OF ALL DENOMINATIONS. New York: Printed and sold by H. Gaine. [1775] 1 v. (unpaged)

A compendium of little stories, an alphabet and maxims projecting lessons for behavior and mental improvements, and, also, some riddles.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER: or, A strange and wonderful relation: shewing how a gentleman of a vast estate in Bristol, had a proud and disobedient daughter, who, because her parents would not support her in all her extravagance, bargained with the Devil to poison them. How an angel informed her parents of their daughter's design. How she lay in a trance four days; and when she was put into the grave, she came to life again, and related the wonderful things she saw in the other world. Likewise the substance of a sermon preached on this occasion, by the Rev. Mr. Williams, from Luke xv. 24. Danvers: Printed and sold by E. Russell, next Bell-Tavern [1776?] 16 p. illus.

This grim preachment was issued by various printers up to about 1820.

Watts, Isaac. THE FIRST SET OF CATECHISMS AND PRAYERS: or, The religion of little children under seven or eight years of age. Collected out of the larger books of prayers and catechisms for childhood and youth. By I. Watts. D. D. The twelfth edition. Boston: Printed and sold by S. Kneeland in Queen-Street, opposite to the Prison. 1762. 16 p.

By the same English divine who created more enduring verses.

[White, Thomas] A LITTLE BOOK FOR LITTLE CHILDREN. Wherein are set down several directions for little children: and several remarkable stories both ancient and modern, of little children. Divers whereof are of those lately deceased. Boston, in N. E.: Reprinted by T. Green, for Nicholas Buttolph, at the corner of Gutteridges Coffee-House. 1702. 94 p.

Described by Welch as a "gruesome compilation"; one of the earliest American children's books with religious narratives.

Stories

Aulnoy, Marie Catherine Jumelle de Berneville, *comtesse* d'. QUEEN MAB: containing a select collection of only the best, most instructive, and entertaining tales of the fairies: viz. 1. Graciosa and Percineta. 2. The fair one with golden locks. 3. The blue bird. 4. The invisible prince. 5. The Princess Verenata. 6. The Princess Rosetta. 7. The golden bough. 8. The orange-tree and the bee. 9. The little good mouse. Written by the Countess D'Aulnoi. Adorned with curious cuts. To which are added, A fairy tale in the ancient English style, by Dr. Parnell: and Queen Mab's song. London: Printed for J. Dodsley, in Pall Mall. MDCCLXX. [1770] 367 p. illus.

Another edition of Mme. D'Aulnoy's tales appeared as *The History of the Tales of the Fairies* ("newly done from the French"). It contains many of the above stories and was printed in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1800.

Another, *A Collection of Novels and Tales* (London, 1721. 2 v.), includes "The Story of Finella the Cinder-girl" (the first appearance of Cinderella in English).

Today, "The Blue Bird" (illustrated by Fiona

French. New York, Walck, 1972) and "The White Cat" (Illustrated by Errol Le Cain. Scarsdale, New York, Bradbury Press, 1974) are available in picture-book form; and there is *The White Cat and Other Old French Fairy Tales* (Translated by Rachel Field. Illustrated by Elizabeth MacKinstrey. New York, Macmillan, 1967).

[Bunyan, John] THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIM: containing an account of the wonderful adventures and miraculous escapes of a Christian, in his travels from the land of destruction to the New Jerusalem. First American edition. Worcester: Printed by Isaiah Thomas Jun. Sold wholesale and retail at his Book-Store. October, 1798. 2 v. in 1 (219 p.) illus.

A *Pilgrim's Progress* of today is available in an abridged edition illustrated by Robert Lawson (Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1939).

Defoe, Daniel. THE WONDERFULL LIFE AND MOST SURPRISING ADVENTURES OF ROBINSON CRUSOE, of York, mariner. Containing a full and particular ac[c]ount how he lived twenty-eight years in an uninhabited island, on the coast of America; how the ship was lost in a storm, and all his companions were drowned, and he only was cast upon the shore by the wreck. With A true relation how he was at last miraculously preserved, by pirates. Carefully abridged. London: Printed for the Booksellers of London and Westminster. 1775. 118 p. front.

Contents: The life and adventures of Robinson Crusoe.—Farther adventures of Robinson Crusoe. v. 2.—Robinson Crusoe's vision of the angelic world. v. 3.

American editions were also available; d'Alté Welch lists a New York (Hugh Gaine) imprint of 1774, and Evans, a Philadelphia (Robert Bell) imprint of 1776.

Dodsley, Robert. SELECT FABLES OF AESOP AND OTHER FABULISTS. In three books. Containing, I. Fables from the antients. II. Fables from the moderns. III. Original fables newly invented. By Robert Dodsley. [Seven lines quoted] Philadelphia: Printed and sold by Robert Bell, in Third-Street. MDCCLXXVII. [1777] 371 p. illus.

The earliest dated English edition appears to be the one printed in Birmingham by John Baskerville for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall Mall, in 1761.

[Fielding, Sarah] THE GOVERNESS; or, Little female academy. Being the history of Mrs. Teachum, and her nine girls. With their nine days amusement. Calculated for the entertainment and instruction of young ladies in their education. By the author of David Simple. A new edition. [Thirteen lines from] Shakesp. Midsummer Night's-Dream. Philadelphia: Printed by T. Dobson, at the Stone House, No. 41, Second-Street. M,DCC,XCI. [1791] 228 p.

The first edition was printed in London for the author and sold by A. Millar in 1749.

A moral miscellany, sometimes subtitled "or, evening amusements at a boarding school." This includes the following fairy tale, which was also published separately as THE STORY OF THE CRUEL GIANT BARBARICO, THE GOOD GIANT BENEFICO, AND THE LITTLE PRETTY DWARF MIGNON. Boston: Printed by Mein and Fleeming, and to be sold by John Mein at the London Book-Store, Northside of King-Street. MDCCLXVIII. [1768] At which place may be had, a great variety of entertaining and instructive books for children. 53 p.

The Governess is available today (London, Oxford University Press, 1968).

Goody Two Shoes. THE HISTORY OF LITTLE GOODY TWO-SHOES; otherwise called, Mrs. Margery Two-Shoes. With the means by which she acquired her learning and wisdom, and in consequence thereof her estate. Set forth at large for the benefit of those, Who from a state of rags and care, And having shoes but half a pair, Their fortune and their fame would fix, And gallop in a coach and six. See the original manuscript in the Vatican at Rome, and the cuts by Michael Angelo; illustrated with comments of our great modern critics. New York: Printed by H. Gaine, at the Bible and Crown, in Hanover-Square. 1775. 156 p. illus.

This one-time nursery favorite, in Newbery's *Lilliputian Library*, is available today: *The History of Little Goody Two Shoes* (New York, Macmillan, 1924).

Guy of Warwick *(Romance)*. THE HISTORY OF GUY, EARL OF WARWICK. London: Printed for the Booksellers. [1750?] 23 p.

A medieval romance that survived as a chapbook, this describes the exploits of a knight who overcame a giant.

Jack the Giant-killer. [THE HISTORY OF JACK AND THE GIANTS. Part I. To which is added The third voyage of Sindbad the sailor. Newport: Printed by S. Southwick, 1770?] 24 p.

This is the earliest known publication of *Sindbad the Sailor* in the United States.

The King and the cobbler. THE MOST DELIGHTFUL HISTORY OF THE KING AND THE COBLER. Shewing how the King first came acquainted with the cobler, and the many pleasant humours which happened thereupon, &c. [cut] The cobler sitting and whistling in his stall. [cut] The cobler's reception and behaviour at court. [Boston] Printed and sold by John Boyle, in Marlborough-Street. [1770?] 16 p. illus.

The king referred to in this "pleasant humour" is Henry the Eighth.

THE MOTHER'S GIFT; or, A present for all little children who are good. Embellished with cuts. New York: Printed and sold by Hugh Gaine. [1775]

One of a series of four instructive stories, the others being *Father's Gift, Sister's Gift,* and *Brother's Gift.*

A NEW GIFT FOR CHILDREN: delightful and entertaining stories for little masters and misses. Boston: Printed by D. Fowle. [1756?] 30 p. illus.

Like *The Prodigal Daughter,* this book of stories was published by the Boston printer to whom the young Isaiah Thomas was apprenticed and under whose tutelage he practiced the art of engraving.

The *New Gift* is regarded as the oldest storybook—the earliest non-Biblical child's book—to bear an American imprint. Its title page reveals the moral instruction to be conveyed.

NURSE TRUELOVE'S NEW-YEAR'S GIFT: or, The book of books for children. Adorned with cuts. And designed for a present to every little boy who would become a great man, and ride upon a fine horse; and to every little girl, who would become a fine woman, and ride in a governour's coach. But let us turn over the leaf and see more of the matter. The first Worcester edition. Worcester [Mass.]: Printed by Isaiah Thomas and sold at his bookstore. MDCCLXXXVI. [1786] 58 p. illus.

An English and Irish edition of this work

which contains "The House That Jack Built" was advertised by John Newbery in 1753.

[Perrault, Charles] FAIRY TALES, or Histories of past times. With morals: Containing, I. The little Red Riding-Hood. II. The fairy. III. Blue Beard. IV. The Sleeping Beauty in the wood. V. The master-cat: or, Puss in Boots. VI. Cinderilla: or, The little glass slipper. VII. Riquet with the tuft. VIII. Little Thumb. IX. The discreet princess. Haverhill [Mass.]: Printed by Peter Edes. MDCCXCIV. [1794] 83 p.

Earlier English language editions available from London in 1729 and 1763.

These classic fairy tales are available today in many picture-book editions as well as in *Perrault's Complete Fairy Tales* (Illustrated by W. H. Robinson. New York, Dodd, Mead, 1961).

Swift, Jonathan. THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN GULLIVER, in a voyage to the islands of Lilliput and Brobdingnag. Abridged from the works of the celebrated Dean Swift. Adorned with cuts. Philadelphia: Printed by Young and M'Culloch, the corner of Chesnut and Second-Streets. 1787. 128 p. illus.

The Travels and Adventures of Captain L. G., an abridged edition, in chapbook format, was published in London in the 1750s.

Valentine and Orson. THE RENOWNED HISTORY OF VALENTINE AND ORSON, the two sons of the Emperor of Greece. Haverhill [Mass.]: Printed by Peter Edes. MDCCXCIV. [1794] 100 p.

The New History of Valentine and Orson, an English abridged edition of this fifteenth-century romance originally published in France, was published in London for E. Midwinter in the 1750s. It served for over a century as an English chapbook—about two brothers separated in childhood, one brought up at court and one by a bear.

The story was later included in Walter Crane's *Cinderella Picture Book* (London and New York, J. Lane [1897]).

Whittington and his cat. THE FAMOUS AND REMARKABLE HISTORY OF SIR RICHARD WHITTINGTON, three times Lord-Mayor of London. Who lived in the time of King Henry the Fifth. Boston: Printed [by T. and J. Fleet] and sold at the Heart & Crown. [177-?] 12 p.

Available today as the picture book *Dick Whittington and His Cat* (Illustrated by Marcia Brown. New York, Scribner, 1950), as well as in many collections and other single-tale editions.

Rhymes and Songs

THE NEW-YEAR'S GIFT; or, The first book to teach every little girl and boy the A B C. Containing The life and death of the apple-pye, with A was an archer. Cock Robin's farewell to all the birds in the air, and Naughty boy Jack. New York: Hugh Gaine. 1774.

Advertised in Gaine's edition of *The Wonderful Life, and Surprising Adventures of That Renowned Hero, Robinson Crusoe* (New York, 1774).

Tom Thumb. THE FAMOUS TOMMY THUMB'S LITTLE STORY-BOOK: containing his life and surprising adventures; to which are added, Tommy Thumb's fables, with morals and, at the end, pretty stories, that may be sung or told. (Adorned with many curious pictures.) Boston: Printed and sold by W. M'Alpine in Marlborough Street. 1768. 32 p.

The earliest known American children's book to contain the nursery rhymes that later appeared in *Mother Goose's Melody*. All but one of the rhymes had been published previously in England in *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* ([n.p., 1744?]).

Watts, Isaac. DIVINE SONGS ATTEMPTED IN EASY LANGUAGE FOR THE USE OF CHILDREN. By I. Watts, D. D. [Three lines quoted] The fourteenth edition. Boston: Printed for, and sold by A. Barclay at the sign of the Gilt Bible, in Cornhill. M,DCC,LXXV. [1775] 47 p. illus., port.

To be found in modern anthologies are such of Watts' "songs" as "A Cradle Hymn," "How Doth the Little Busy Bee," "Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come," "The Sluggard," and "Let Dogs Delight To Bark and Bite."

Game and Fun Books

John-the-giant-killer, *esq., pseud.* FOOD FOR THE MIND: or, A new riddle-book, compiled for

the use of the great and the little good boys and girls, in the United States. [Two lines quoted from] Homer. [Two lines quoted from] Pufferdorf. Boston: Printed and sold by S. Hall, No. 53, Cornhill. 1798. 63 p.

An English edition by J. Newbery is listed in the January 1757 issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

A LITTLE PRETTY POCKET-BOOK, intended for the instruction and amusement of little Master Tommy, and pretty Miss Polly. With two letters from Jack the giant-killer; as also a ball and pincushion, the use of which will infallibly make Tommy a good boy, and Polly a good girl. To which is added, A little song-book, being a new attempt to teach children the use of the English alphabet, by way of diversion. The first Worcester edition. Printed at Worcester, Massachusetts: By Isaiah Thomas, and sold, wholesale and retail, at his Book Store. MDCCLXXXVII. [1787] 122 p. illus.

An English edition was advertised by John Newbery in 1744. An edition was printed in New York by Hugh Gaine in 1762.

A tiny volume in a fine very-and-gilt binding, with sixty-five illustrations. The work is available in facsimile (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967).

Wiseman, Billy, *pseud.* THE PUZZLING CAP: a choice collection of riddles, in familiar verse. By Master Billy Wiseman. [Four lines of verse] Adorned with cuts. New York: Printed by William Durell for Thomas B. Jansen & Co. 1800. 31 p.

An English and Scottish edition, published in London, was advertised by F. Newbery in *The Cries of London* (1775).

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN or, The comical metamorphoses a work entirely calculated to excite laughter in grown persons and promote morality in the young ones of both sexes: decorated with 34 copper plates curiously drawn and elegantly engraved. [Four lines of verse] Boston: Printed and sold by John D. M'Dougall [and] Company two doors south of the Treasurer's Office. [1780?] 64 p. illus.

John Goodall's wordless picture books of today with their alternating half pages are related to the metamorphosis.

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